

## Chapter 1- His Lordship

*"Harry is that really you?"* Harry heard the dearest voice in his head.

*"Yes mum"* he hissed. *"Oh I must think like a human."*

*"What have you become, Harry?"* That was another voice in his head.

Harry trembled. *"I followed my fears."* He thought.

*"But you must be among the living. Harry, what have you done? Why did you change the past?"*

*"So you know?"*

*"Yes we do. We know everything about you."*

*"I had to. I had to mum. When I was little, Uncle Vernon used to lock me in the cupboard without dinner. I would imagine I had a home and my parents were still alive. I was imagining my mother would kiss me on Sunday morning while I was still in my bed, and there would be breakfast waiting for me downstairs in the kitchen. And my father would take me to a football match in the afternoon. That's all I ever wanted, mum. That's all. That's why I did it."*

Harry felt happiness, sorrow and desperation all at once.

*"Oh my son! I'm sorry! I'm so sorry! Sometimes I wish we had all died that night!"*

*"But you must leave at once! This isn't a place for the living!"* He heard his father's voice.

*"No I don't want to leave you!"*

*"But you can't stay! This is the realm of the dead!"*

*"But you aren't dead. I've been told you were kissed! "*

*"Yes that's true. You see my son; we all have two parts of our soul. One is the immortal; it passes from one person that died to the other that was just born. The other one exists only while we're living. That's our life force and it disappears when we die. Dementors suck the living part of our soul, and then the immortal one isn't free to find another home. Therefore we're doomed to stay forever in the realm of the dead. Our physical bodies rot in the dungeon you must have seen, but never die. We feel the pain that our bodies suffer and the pain of being here. It's not that people don't remember their previous lives, it's just so unbearable remembering this place and they lose all memories of it and everything that had happened before it as soon as their souls find a new home. That's why we didn't know you brought us back to life."*

*"I brought you back to life?"*

*"Yes. In the realm of the dead time doesn't exist. There can be many lives but only one death."*

*"Does Sirius know?"*

*"No. He'll realize what had really happened only when he arrives here again."*

Harry felt his blood cooling. He knew he wouldn't be able to go back if he lost consciousness.

*"Mum, dad, I have to go now. But I'll be back."*

*"No! You mustn't come back. You don't know what's lurking down here!"*

*"Mum, dad, I'm so sorry for doing this to you. I didn't know!"*

*"We know son. We love you with all our hearts no matter what!"*

*"You must go now!"*

Harry started sliding up through the waves of desperation and misery. He knew those were feelings of souls of others that were kissed. The way up seemed much shorter. The fog disappeared and suddenly he saw light.

"Harry, are you all right?" Hermione was looking at him worriedly. She'd gotten used to his serpent form and could tell by then if something seemed wrong with Nemesis. Harry slid towards the fireplace. He knew he had to warm up his blood before transforming back into a human.

"Athena sent you a message by Patronus. It says it's urgent."

*"It wasn't cold in here" Harry thought. "My blood cooled while I was dreaming, just like I actually was there. If something had seized me I wouldn't have come back!"*

Hermione understood what Harry was trying to do and summoned some heat to help him warm up.

"I wish I could talk to you in Parseltongue." Harry said after becoming a human again.

"I've already researched that. It's not possible to learn it. One either has it or not." She gave him a piece of parchment. "This is from Athena."

Harry took the parchment.

*Dear Harry,*

*Malfoy manor is not safe. I will meet you in the Blacks summerhouse. You already know where it is. It is empty since Bellatrix died and Narcissa fled from the country. I'm on my way and you must come as soon as you can. DO NOT APPARATE!*

*Athena*

"I have to go!" Harry told Hermione. "You stay here with the twins and make sure they don't do anything silly."

"Should I say 'Yes sir'?" Hermione asked sarcastically.

"No. But bear in mind that we're in the middle of a war and every mistake can be our last. I'm counting on you Hermione! Don't let me down!"

After one hour of flying Harry landed in the bushes near the pond and quietly transformed into a serpent. He knew the Black's summerhouse very well. His parents used to take Rose and him there while it still belonged to Sirius. Later he came again when Narcissa and Draco visited Bellatrix. It was supposed to be deserted, but he spotted a faint light coming through the heavy curtains from the guest house. It wasn't difficult for him to sneak in. As he already suspected somebody was in the lounge. But he certainly didn't expect to see Lucius Malfoy talking to Cornelius Fudge. Harry came closer. The two men were sitting at the table. Lucius was pouring a drink into their glasses.

"I don't see why we couldn't meet in the library up there." Fudge asked.

"It's because only members of the Black family can come and invite someone in. One of those ancient wards the Black family is so proud of. Obviously since Narcissa left me taking Draco with her, the bloody house doesn't consider me a member of the family."

"Yes I have heard of their wards. There are rumors that even You-know-Who can't break their magic." Fudge said sipping his tea. "Speaking about your master... He must be very displeased with your wife's betrayal."

"The Dark Lord has turned even against his most loyal followers."

"Like you are?"

"Yes, like I. If it wasn't for that Mudblood girl, my only son would be dead!"

Harry clenched his teeth. Even after admitting that Hermione saved Draco's life Lucius couldn't call her anything else but Mudblood. He rushed downstairs determined to make him pay for that when he heard familiar hissing.

*"Where do you think you are going, young man?"*

*"Athena!"* Harry stopped and turned to the cobra who was hiding behind the curtain.

*"There will be time to teach them a lesson, but not just yet. We must find out what they are up to."*

"Lucius, has anyone told you before that you have a serious attitude problem?" Fudge sneered.

"You're not here because of my manners, are you?"

"No. I am not."

"So, why are we here then?" Lucius was as arrogant as ever.

"I've got to know who's willing to die for his master and who would join the winning side when the opportune moment comes."

"And what do you offer in return for that *little* favour?"

"What do you expect?"

"In an unlikely case that you succeed, you will confirm that I was on your side all along. I will retain all mine and my wife's property, and be reinstated to all positions I held. In addition I expect a high position in the Ministry."

"Like education?"

"Don't be ridiculous! I already had that. How about national security?"

"That can be arranged. Well, if that's all, let's work on the details. But first you must sign here. I won't tell you what's going to happen if you break our agreement and tell your master any of this, but you can guess."

Lucius took the quill and put his signature on the parchment in silence.

*"We must have that list."* Athena hissed. *"Fudge is up to something."*

"Severus Snape will be your connection." Fudge proceeded in a commanding voice. "As a half blood nobody takes him seriously and we'll exploit that. You shall report your findings to him every week. Do you have any questions?"

"What if I have to leave the country too?"

"Well you won't. At least not before I say so. Make sure I have that list soon. Once I have it I won't need you anymore."

The two men stood up.

"Oh yes, one more thing." Fudge added.

"What?"

"You might be interested in this article in the *Reykjavik Inquirer*." Fudge smiled spitefully into his face.

"Why on Earth..." Lucius stopped in the middle of the sentence stunned by something he saw in the paper. He grabbed it and after half a minute of frantic reading he vigorously tore it apart and threw it into Fudge's face. The two wizards left the guest house and disappeared into opposite directions.

*"What was that?"* Harry asked when they left.

*"It seems that Lucius is suddenly disenchanted in his beloved Dark Lord!"*

*"Athena, Sirius and Mad-Eye are under arrest, Fudge is about to disband the Resistance and sixty children..."*

*"I know everything!"*

*"But how?"*

*"As I told you I still have connections in the Forbidden Forest. I also know some people in the High Council."*

"But you said..."

"That I'm too old for adventures?"

"Well, yes."

"As the matter of fact I'm not that old." Harry looked at her puzzled. "You see, humans live quite intensively and burn their life force fast. On the other hand, snakes, as cold blooded animals are far more rational. Only humans have much more life force to spare. It means that in last two hundred years or so I spent mostly in serpent shape I aged less then twenty in human terms."

"And that's why you chose to remain a serpent!"

"It isn't the only reason, but I don't want to talk about it." Athena answered leaving no room for further discussion. "Let's see what made dear old Lucius so upset." She mended the paper.

"How did you do that?"

"Oh I learnt in time how to cast some basic spells in my serpent shape. It does come in handy. But you must be snake much longer than you have to be able to do it yourself."

Harry looked at the paper. There was a photograph on the front page showing Narcissa and Draco, completely naked and obviously embarrassed in front of a fireplace in what seemed like a local pub full of people. Draco held his hands on top of his private parts and tried to conceal his mother who was kneeling down holding her arms over her breasts in humiliation. Finally the local constable arrived, covered them with blankets and escorted them outside through the cheering crowd.

Harry laughed and looked at the title above.

*Obscenity in local pub as couple of Brits appeared naked*

*A naked couple of Britons appeared from the fireplace yesterday evening in the jam-packed local pub. The bartender said they apparently had to flee from a jealous husband and misstated the destination. An unnamed source from the Ministry said they refused to reveal their identity, but they were obviously mother and son. Their story that they had a mishap in the Floo network is unconfirmed. The source also said that there were no mishaps where people lost all their clothes and possessions recorded in history. The charges for obscenity were dropped after the couple agreed to join a survival expedition to Greenland.*

Harry laughed. "So he did it after all!"

"Who did what?"

"Ryan from Dublin. He said the smugglers Floo network was unstable and a mishap could have easily happened."

"I think it's time to move to the main house." Athena said apparently uninterested in hearing any more details. "We'll be much safer there."

"But didn't you hear Lucius? Only members of the Black family can enter the house."

*"Sirius is your godfather isn't he? Since your parents are officially dead, you are technically his son. Let's check it out, shall we? Of course you must be a human for that."*

They headed up hill towards the summerhouse. It was difficult for Harry to see anything since he was a human again and Lucius and Fudge took all the lanterns. He hesitated for a moment and then he tried to open the door. It swung silently before he even touched it like it was inviting him into the house. Harry stepped inside and after a few seconds he invited Athena. She slid in and the door closed after her, making absolutely no sound.

Harry looked around. As soon as the door closed the torches on the walls lit the lobby. It was exactly like he remembered it. The floor was decorated with the finest mosaic dominated by the Black's family crest. On the tapestries on the walls were depicted scenes from hunting dragons and other magical creatures.

Suddenly he heard a high pitched voice "Hurry up you lazy lots! We must greet our master!"

Athena quickly hid behind the curtain as Harry faced an old house elf. She was panting and bowing in front of him followed by two pale and skinny teens with blank expressions on their faces. Harry hardly recognized Neville Longbottom and a girl a few years younger than him. Resisting the urge to try "Finite Incantum" on them he stood silently waiting for the house-elf's next move.

"Polly is waiting for your orders, master!"

"Who do you think I am, Polly?"

"Young Harry Potter, our new master!"

"Who told you that?"

"It was in the house log master, like always!"

"Who else knows I'm here?"

"Nobody else master. Only Polly."

"What about Kreacher?"

Polly stepped back terrified. "Oh master wants Polly punished! Master wants Kreacher to come and punish Polly!"

"No, wait! I don't want to punish you! I want to know whether he knows something!"

"Oh no. Kreacher doesn't belong to the Land!"

"Polly, you have to do everything I tell you, is that so?"

"Yes master, everything you command!"

"Now tell me everything you know about land, Black family and why I'm your master. That's an order!"

"Yes master, I is telling Master everything. Polly is telling what is written in the family journal."

"Go on then!" Harry became impatient with Polly's politeness.

Polly started reciting like she was in trance. "A thousands years ago, the Land was wild and lawless. Monsters terrorized those that had nowhere to go but to live here. People lived in fear. But there was one man that refused to be afraid, who was willing to stand ground no matter what. The Land had been waiting for such a man for a long time. One night when he was in the woods the Land spoke to him. And he made a vow. He swore that when times of trouble came he and his family would stand ground and protect the Land at all cost; that he would not spare neither the invader of the Land nor the traitors and that in that battle he would not hesitate to risk his own children's lives for the sake of the Land. And the Land gave him power. And the Land gave power to his children. And they killed all of the monsters and villains and brought peace to the Land. His hair and his eyes were black; as black as coal. And people called him Black. He built the house on the hill above the pond in the very heart of the Land. And whenever times of trouble came the Black family was there to protect the Land. Sirius Black wanted to spare you, my master, from the battle, so he broke the vow and lost his right to be the lord of the Land. Narcissa fled with her son and lost her right as well. But you master, you stood ground. You rejected the offer from the evil wizard to join him even after facing the threat that your sister would die. When your parents die, your younger siblings become your children. And the Land gave you a name: Algot Black."

"I have my name! It's Harry Potter!" Harry shouted.

"Oh yes, master has his name. Yes. And the House knows it. Harry Potter name was in the log. But in the journal it says Algot Black. That's how the Land calls master. The land has its reasons. Not blame Polly. Polly just say what I know." Polly shivered expecting punishment.

"Don't be afraid of me. I will never, ever hurt the innocent!" Harry pledged. "The boy and the girl aren't my slaves anymore. Until the curse is lifted treat them as guests. I want them to have a bath, clean robes and they will eat the same food I eat. Is that understood?"

"Yes master!"

"I need to go and get my friends here. You take care of that until I'm back!"

"But master, we have the fireplace."

"I can't use it. All fireplaces are being monitored."

"Not the one in master's bedroom. Not even the Dark Wizard could use it. My late mistress never invited him into the house. The late mistress was the only one before my master that could say no to the Dark Wizard."

"Are you sure?"

"Oh yes, Polly is sure. Polly know. Polly will tell everything master want to know."

"Am I still a Black if my parents come back?"

"Oh no. Master mustn't. Please master! Don't raise them from the dead. It is a bad magic. Black magic. You can't raise their souls. Undead don't have feelings. It's bad. Master will suffer. Not even the Dark Wizard dared to do that. The Land will never see them as living. The Land see the soul. She not see dead."

Polly's eyes widened. "Polly bad. I is telling master what to do. Bad Polly! Bad Polly!" She started punching herself on the head.

"Stop it! I command you to never hurt yourself again! Do you understand?"

"Yes master."

"I order you to always tell me the truth and everything you know about what I intend to do!"

"Yes master."

"I want to invite my friends."

"Master need not do nothing. The Land knows who is master's friends. Yes it does. The powder is by the fireplace. I show master the way."

The room was very much like any other in Black's residencies, with heavy curtains on the windows, and massive dark redwood furniture. Without wasting his time Harry took the powder and threw it into the fireplace exclaiming "Weasley's hideout!"

SSS

"It's not working Hermione. It can't last more than a few seconds." Fred was trying to improve his image spell.

"Why don't you try the permanency charm right after you cast it?"

"That what I've been doing all day!"

"What about casting the permanency before your spell for the area where the spell will be cast?" Hermione didn't want to quit that easily.

Fred muttered his spells. The image appeared in the centre of their shelter. They waited for several seconds expecting it to disappear. Then they waited for a minute. It was still there. They looked each at other in triumph, but before they could say anything Harry popped from the fireplace.

"Get ready! We're leaving in a minute!" He told Fred.

Fred didn't move.

"Fred have you heard me? We've got to go! Where're the others?"

Then he heard chuckling behind him. Harry turned and faced the twins and Hermione hardly holding their laughter.

"What do you think you're doing?" He asked angrily.

"Practicing and improving our spellcasting, commander." Fred 'reported'.

"We don't have time for this now. But it's brilliant! We better leave it there. Let's go!" He took the powder.



"Harry where are we going? And how come we can suddenly use the Floo network?" Hermione asked.

"This is a secure channel. We're going to the Black's summerhouse. It's almost as safe as the Headquarters! Just trust me on this, will you?" He looked at them and after they nodded their heads he exclaimed "Black's summerhouse, the master's bedroom!"

SSS

Harry, Hermione and the twins rushed from the bedroom into the corridor and then to the library. Athena was waiting there. This was the first time Harry saw her as a human. It was apparent that she was a Malfoy. Her long silvery hair framed an old but still beautiful face. She looked at them curiously with the bluest eyes one could possibly imagine. She was dressed in old fashioned, but elegant robes. As they entered the room she made a curtsy.

"Your lordship." Her appearance and voice were graceful, almost royal.

Hermione and the twins looked at her and Harry in bewilderment. Harry was confused, but managed to bow and say.

"I welcome you to my humble home Lady Malfoy." Harry kissed her hand, "Please meet my friends. This is Hermione Granger, I told you about her."

"Indeed he told me so much that I feel like I already know you Miss Granger. It's a great pleasure to meet you in person, at last."

"The pleasure is all mine, Headmistress."

"Thank you. I like that title better. I was disowned by the Malfoy family anyways."

"And these are Fred and George Weasley."

"I heard about you too, young gentlemen."

The twins bowed, not knowing what to say.

"Athena, I mean Headmistress," Harry faltered.

"Yes Harry, you may still call me Athena. Though I look younger as a serpent don't I?"

"That was exactly what I was going to ask. Why did you transform into a human after so many years?"

"Because I can't hide anymore." Athena responded slowly. "There's something very dangerous going on. I wasn't here accidentally. I was following our former Minister. He met with the ambassadors of four continental powers. He promised them an uprising that will fail miserably and be suppressed in bloodshed. They can use it then as an excuse to intervene. Their cohorts of criminals, adventurers and mercenaries are already waiting for the signal. Once they are here they won't leave. I'm afraid they plan to take all the land and perhaps reinstate Fudge as a puppet minister with no real power."

"But how they expect to defeat Voldemort and the Dementors? They know that even Dumbledore failed to do that!"

"They think that Dumbledore was too soft, too old and too overrated. They also think that the Dementors will betray Voldemort as well. Anyways after reports that a teenage girl deflected them single-handedly, no one treats them as a serious threat."

"And what about Voldemort?"

"They think his power was always overrated too, and is fading."

"So if I make Voldemort weaker I'm helping them!"

"Only if they really come. And they won't if there's no uprising. We must warn Sirius and Moody. It's only a question how."

"I have an idea! Fred, George, you're supposed to be the greatest pranksters ever, aren't you?"

"What do you have in mind?"

"Can you fool Madam Pomfrey that one of you is seriously injured?"

"Well, yeah! Piece of cake! Why?"

"Hermione will take George in. You two must find Sirius and Mad-Eye and tell them what's going on. Hermione, you must persuade as many people as you can to join us here. They all trust you." Harry was completely carried away.

"But Harry, if Fudge and his trusted men are there they'll arrest me!" Hermione said.

"Don't you worry Hermione! We'll take care of that!" Fred bragged.

"How?"

"Give me your wand."

Hermione pulled her wand from her sleeve and gave it to Fred.

"Watch this." Fred snapped the stick he found by the fireplace and laid it by the Hermione's wand. He muttered spells while holding his wand above them. The stick changed its shape until it looked just like the wand.

"Yes, I know. It's a replica. Every Auror knows about that trick!"

"You just wait."

Fred took another stick and repeated the spell. Then he muttered different spells for some time. He'd never looked so focused and somber.

"There." He sighed in relief. "Try something simple."

Hermione took the wand. It looked and felt just like the original. "*Lumos!*" She flicked the wand and light lit her face.

"How?"

"I stored some basic spells in the replica. That's what every wizard can do with someone else's wand. If used, the replica leaves the same signature as the original."

"This is how we do it." George joined them. "You conceal your real wand so nobody can find it. Then you conceal this replica so it can be found if they search really hard. If they ask you to hand over your wand you give them the fake one. Then they search you and eventually they find the other replica. They cast a few spells and take the signature. You use your real wand later. It got us out of trouble in several occasions." George laughed.

"Young men, I can only thank Goodness you were not around Hogwarts when I was Headmistress. But if you ever come back to finish your studies I'll personally take care you will have an 'O' in Transfiguration!" Athena didn't hide how impressed she was.

"So what will be your 'injury'?" Harry asked George.

"Poisoning! Madam Pomfrey remembers us from our young age. She treated us several times for poisoning while we were at Hogwarts. I'll make a great show this time!"

"I'm sure you will. You can hide two broomsticks from the house near Headquarters, because they'll probably take yours. Fred and I will escort you to the Forbidden Forest. I have a little job for the two of us while you and Hermione are there. And remember: You can't apparate here!"

"Athena you're welcome to stay in my home as long as you like."

"Thank you Harry, but I have to pay some old friends a visit. Oh, one more thing." Athena added casually. "Haven't you forgotten something?"

"What would that be?" Harry asked.

"You must have the antidote to counter Veritaserum." She continued, "Just in case."

"But it's very complex potion! Where can we find it now?" Hermione asked.

"Master told Polly to always tell the truth and everything I know about what master intend to do."

"Yes Polly, speak."

"There are many potions in the cellar. Late mistress was afraid of Veritaserum. Late mistress had many secrets."

"Thank you Polly. Show us the way."

"You actually have a house elf, *your lordship*?" Hermione hissed on their way down.

"Well, it comes with the land."

"And how come you own the *land*? Doesn't it belong to the Black family?"

"I'm the Black family now. It's a long story."

"Over here!" George exclaimed. "There must be years of potions supplies in here!"

The place looked like a wine cellar only with bottles of potions instead of wine.

"Only the late mistress could come in. Not her husband, not even Dark Wizard knew about this cellar." Polly explained.

"Thank you Polly. Well done. I'll make sure you'll be well rewarded." Harry said looking at Hermione.

"Let's take what we need and get going."

SSS

Rodolphus Lestrangle was very nervous. This was the first time he had to face his Dark Lord on his own. At all other occasions he had escorted his late wife Bellatrix. She visited the Dark Lord alone much more often than with him and he never asked any questions. He had never loved Bella. Oh no, nobody could have loved Bella. He worshiped her like a goddess. He belonged to her like a slave. But above all, he was afraid of her.

He walked down spiral stairs for quite a while until he reached a small black iron-studded door. It was low and narrow as the entrance to a vaulted grave, ascended by a ragged step, the dust on which lied untrodden. In hideous mockery of ornament, this ghastly portal was surmounted by a set of gyves and chains, which hung in a square niche, and looked like the remains of some human skeleton kept there as a horrible warning to scare anyone who came near. And that was the door Rodolphus was about to open. Only the fear of his Dark Lord gave him enough courage to do it. He stepped inside trembling. The room was empty, lit by black candles. On the other side of the chamber resting on the dais was a huge marble block covered by blood-red velvet. As he walked closer, he saw Bellatrix lying on it. Her naked body was not only perfectly preserved, but looked twenty years younger. This was Bella on the day he had married her. Her black hair was tidily spread around her head in a perfect circle. Her hands were lying by her side. The only piece of jewelry she wore was a large amethyst medallion on a red-gold chain around her long, perfectly shaped neck. Rodolphus shivered.

"You're so beautiful!" He cried.

"Yes she is, isn't she?" Voldemort appeared behind Rodolphus.

"My Lord!" Rodolphus kneeled before Voldemort.

Voldemort grinned but his eyes remained cold. He looked at Rodolphus like a hawk. "I'm glad you managed to find my secret quarters. Nobody will spy on us here! I don't want anybody to see Bella!"

"My Lord, if there was anything that could be done to bring her back! Anything at all, I would be the first to do it!"

It was quite a safe pledge and Rodolphus knew it. There was no magic that could bring someone back from the dead.

"I'm glad you said that. It couldn't work without your consent."

Rodolphus looked at him in bewilderment.

"Since the day she died," Voldemort continued, "I was thinking of nothing else but how to bring her back. Indeed, not even my magic can raise her from the dead. Her immortal soul is lost forever. But there is something I can still do. I rejuvenated her body as you can see. It

took a lot of effort and many had to give all their blood for that. And now all I need is a life force from a willing giver to breathe into her. Your life force Rodolphus!"

"My Lord!" Rodolphus stepped back.

"My faithful Dementors will help me!"

Rodolphus fell on his knees overwhelmed by the presence of the Dementors who entered the room. They obviously didn't affect Voldemort who was looking at Bellatrix and smiling.

*"Bientôtma Belle, tres bientôt, and we'll be together again!"*

Rodolphus collapsed onto the floor struggling to breathe. One of the Dementors glided towards him and grabbed him by his shoulders. Helplessly lying on the floor Rodolphus saw an eyeless face beneath the hood inching closer. He felt the breath from the shapeless hole that was sucking air with hissing sound. He couldn't see anything but the darkness of that hole. Rodolphus knew he was looking into the deepness of Death. He faintly tried to break free, but after a few seconds the twitching stopped and Rodolphus remained motionless on the floor. The Dementor silently glided towards Bellatrix and loudly exhaled into her mouth.

With a slight wave of his hand Voldemort dismissed the Dementors. They left carrying Rodolphus' body among them. Voldemort watched Bellatrix in tense silence. Finally her eyes opened and she looked at him.

"My Lord."

"Bella!" He took her by her hand.

Bellatrix rose into a sitting position effortlessly.

"What does my Lord command?" She asked in a monotone.

## Chapter 2 - What Does It Take To Hate Someone?

The mood in the Headquarters was grim and tense. After the announcement that Sirius and Mad-Eye were arrested the members of the Resistance were told to remain in the common room until further notice. Crouch and the others from the High Council interviewed them one by one in the library. This had been dragging on and on the whole day and evening. It was almost midnight when the silence in the common room was broken by two people loudly entering the Headquarters.

"George is sick. Please quickly call Madam Pomfrey!" Hermione said panting heavily. Her hair was messy from flying on the broomstick and she had blood and puke stains all over her robes. She was holding George who could barely stand, green-faced. He muttered something unrecognizable and started puking blood and bleeding from his nose. As a few people tried to help Hermione, Madam Pomfrey rushed in.

"George took one of the potions he and Fred made. He's delusional!" Hermione told her.

"Quickly, take him to the hospital wing!" She commanded. "Where's Fred?" She asked Hermione who followed them behind.

"I don't know! He went somewhere with Harry!" Hermione answered. Some looked at her bewildered like speaking Harry's name was some sort of taboo.

"All right everybody leave now!" Madam Pomfrey ordered after they laid George onto the bed in her surgery. "You too." She said in a lower voice looking at Hermione.

Not looking at them she turned to George probing his pulse and examining his eyes. He grabbed her by her hand.

"They're coming! They're coming! We're all gonna die!" He screamed. By that time no one else was in the surgery.

"Calm down George!" Madam Pomfrey said in a soft but still firm voice. "Nobody is coming. You're safe here. You just lay down and I'll take care of everything."

"Madam Pomfrey!" George said in his normal sneering voice. "Are you trying to seduce me Madam Pomfrey?"

"I should have known!" She jumped from the chair. "What does all this mean?"

"Forgive me please, but I had to be convincing. Something really bad and dangerous is going on and you're one of a few people I can trust."

She examined his face "You're not joking now, are you?"

"No, I was never more serious in my entire life."

He told her about Fudge's plan only skipping to tell her about Malfoy and Snape. "Professor McGonagall and Nicolas Flamel must be informed. Make sure nobody else knows about this!" George finished.

"Leave it to me. You stay in your bed and keep pretending."

### Chapter 3 – Rainbows and Waterfalls

Harry and Bellatrix were lying in bed.

"You could easily kill me with your bare hands. Why didn't you?" Harry asked playing with her long hair.

"You're the Protector of the Land now, the master of the House and the only true Black." Bellatrix turned towards Harry supporting her head with her arm.

"But I'm not Black!"

"The Land decided that you are, Algol."

Harry hesitated for a moment "What about Sirius?"

"He's weak. I'm glad I killed him at least in one life. He never understood, never accepted his destined mission."

"Is that the reason you hated him so much?"

"He rejected me. He wasn't worthy of the Black name. Blacks should only marry Blacks, the purest blood of all. We serve the Land and no other master."

"What about Voldemort?"

"You mean Tom Riddle?" Bellatrix nearly laughed sitting up. The sheet fell from her breasts.

Harry gazed at her appreciatively.

"He's nobody," She continued tiding her hair. "But yet he has true power. I had to find the secret of his power."

"But why did you *hate* everyone so much? Why did you torture people?"

"Because they were weak. They deserved it."

"The Longbottoms were not weak!"

"And what about you?" She asked taking the sheets off of their naked bodies. "You were weak a few minutes ago. You were willing to kill and die for me, weren't you?"

"Why did you come?"

"I don't have feelings of the soul, but I have feelings of the flesh. I can feel heat or pain. And I have lust! No love, no hate, but lust. And only the true Black is worthy of my lust. I was the mistress of the house before; I'll be your mistress now."

"Are we in times of trouble?" Still staring, Harry tried to divert his attention from thinking of what he would do for her.

"Yes. And now you'll have to do what I would if you didn't stop me."

"But you were evil. How could you be the Protector of the Land?"

"The Land doesn't care about good and evil. The Land must be protected at all cost. If not, the chaos will prevail and many will suffer."

"From whom am I supposed to protect the Land?" *"From whom? Have I really said that? What am I turning into?"* Harry thought as he spoke. It felt like somebody else and not him was with Bellatrix.

"From all invaders and traitors. That includes Tom Riddle. You should have never given him the diary. Now he knows that you know about the Horcruxes. He'll move them to safer places and put more wards and traps for you."

"But..." Harry was going to say something when she put her hand over his mouth.

"Enough talking!" And she through herself onto him kissing him wildly.

---

It was late morning when Harry was woken up by the sound from the fireplace. He quickly dressed into his sleeping robes and got up. It was Sirius's head in the fire.

"Sirius!"

"We're in Hogsmade and we'll come tonight to Blackdown Manor if your lordship doesn't mind."

"Stop teasing me!"

"I'm serious."

"I'm Harry."

"See you tonight."

"Wait! Who else is coming?"

"Weasleys, Hermione, Mad-Eye, Minerva, Angelina, Cedric and a quite a few others."

"What about Remus?"

"He stayed. But he's all right now."

"See you all tonight."

Sirius' head disappeared.

When Harry went down the breakfast was already on the table. Fred was there, his eyes glowing.

"I made it!" He announced.

"You made what?" Harry asked helping himself.



"The Cheering powder you told me to make, remember?"

"Oh yeah." Harry yawned. "What's in it?"

"You don't wanna know."

"How do you use it?"

"You sniff it like this." Fred made two lines on the table.

"That's not good. I need it on my broomstick."

Fred looked around and after a while opened an old show case in the dining room.

"Here!" He exclaimed taking the snuff-box from the show case. "In old times they used to sniff tobacco powder from this." Fred poured the yellow powder out and replaced it with his pink cheering powder.

"Wait" I have something to add." Harry took his Black Ergot powder and mixed it with Fred's.

"OK, let's try this one out!" Harry said shaking the snuff-box. They sniffed.

"Do you feel anything?"

"Nothing."

A few seconds later, Harry realised his palms were getting wet. The room that was usually dark was filled with bright light of vivid colours. The lounge seemed like it had 100 dimensions with shifting patterns in the mosaics in the floor.

Suddenly he felt a strange feeling start in his stomach and slowly spread through his body into his brain. It was a warm feeling of complete ecstasy.

"Fred, why are your eyes so big?"

"To better see you my dear little child!" They burst into laughter.

"Who let all these monkeys in?"

"Why don't you freeze them?" Harry said without looking. He was too occupied with the crystal chandelier that was changing its shape and colour in a dancing light. It was so fascinating that all he could do was lie back and stare at it.

"Petrificus..." Fred faltered. "What was the other word?" Then he ran up the stairs. "Look at me. I have wings! I need no broomstick!" Then he stumbled downstairs. Harry thought it was because of the shining, sparkly water that was slowly sliding toward him.

"Broomstick! Let's play some Quidditch!"

"With whom?"

"Look! Don't you see the whole Quidditch team waiting for us outside. And there's our old Keeper Oliver!" Harry could only make out Oliver's face. The other players whizzed and flew too fast for him to make them out.

"Where? I see only goblins!" Fred was grinning. They made their way outside. Harry looked at the sky. He wondered for a moment why he had worried so much about everything. He and Fred were invincible! They would rule the world!

"Cheer me Fred!" The purple ray hit Harry who started laughing hysterically. "Cheer me again!" Another ray hit him.

"Let's hunt some Dementors!"

"Dementors!" This time Fred was the one who burst into laughter. "Aren't they such charming fellows? Cheer me Harry!" The purple ray lit the area once more. They mounted their broomsticks and kicked off of the ground.

"Where did they all go?"

Harry saw the waterfall falling from the sky in a slow motion. As he came closer he realised it was a rainbow streaming its rays down upon him. He spread his arms flying upwards. He was light. He was the rainbow spanning the sky.

"Where did they all go?" He heard Fred shouting.

"Let's look for them!" Harry made a double-loop and zoomed forward.

After half hour of zigzagging, they saw a wizard in the garden of his house.

"Harry let's cheer this bloke!"

"Hush. He mustn't hear us."

They flew low through the bushes, which seemed to be hissing and humming softly. It made Harry smile. Suddenly two purple rays hit the wizard into the back. He turned smiling at them.

"Isn't that the most famous fugitive Harry Potter?" He laughed pointing his finger at Harry. "I'll get rich!" Two more rays hit him. "This is getting better and better!" The wizard was exalted. His face was moulding into that of a jacklantern.

Harry and Fred exchanged rays between themselves as they whizzed in circles around the wizard.

"You know Harry, this doesn't count. He must be in pain. Then we'll know it really works!"

"You're absolutely right. *Crucio!*" Harry tried to cast the Cruciatus.

Nothing happened.

"You're too happy for Cruciatus, Harry!"

"You're going to torture me!" The wizard exclaimed. "You're going to torture me! What fun!"

Finally Harry set the wizard's robes on fire. He was obviously in pain and not laughing anymore.

"Cheer me Fred!" The purple ray hit Harry. He thought he would explode from all the elation. He felt like screaming and shouting his happiness to the whole world. But all he could do was laugh. Finally he cast the spell.

"*Cheerio!*" The wizard became mirthful again.

"Look at me! I'm burning, I'm burning. I'm a torch now!"

"Should we extinguish the fire now, Fred?"

"I dunno. What if he's a Death Eater?"

"Let's ask him! Excuse me sir, are you a Death Eater?"

"Of course I am. How else would I have such a beautiful house! And here is my sign! *MORSMORDRE!*" The scull appeared above his house. "My wand is burning too!" He laughed. His skin was turning black.

"He's dying Harry! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yeah I know! Ha, ha! And he announced it! Ha, ha!"

"Everyone will think he betrayed his master and was punished for it. Isn't that funny?"

"To die for!" Harry hooted sarcastically at his own joke.

"Let's go back." Fred said watching the carbonized corpse on the ground.

"Yeah, dead people are so dull!"

By the time they reached the house, Harry was starting to come down. He felt peaceful and open. "I'm a little bit bored of this," he said. They got off their broomsticks and staggered their way inside. The different colours that had lit the lounge were now merging into one.

"Yeah. No fun. Why is the house swinging?"

"It's not the house it's the floor! What did you give me you idiot?"

"You put your stuff in! That was stupid!"

"Who did you call stupid?"

"Master, master!" Polly broke in, holding the flask with a potion.

"What now?"

"Master ordered Polly to give him this when master comes back. Yes, that is master's order." Polly was bowing deeply as she spoke.

"Not now!" Harry was too busy looking at the room. It was full of the glittering water. Water was on the floor and on the furniture. Water was dripping of the walls.

"But Polly must follow her orders! Master ordered to force him to drink if necessary!"

"Well then. This better be good!" Harry sipped a little bit of the potion. Judging by his face it had a terrible taste. "I know this one! Sha could have made it a little bit more bearable!" It took a few seconds for the potion to take full effect. The place returned to normal and he had a slight headache.

"Fred you better drink this!"

"No way! I'm not gonna take no more of your shit!" Fred was speeding through the lounge knocking things to the floor.

"Oh yes you will!" Harry somehow blocked Fred's way for a moment making eye contact. "Drink this!" Harry repeated in commanding voice.

Fred mechanically took a flask and swallowed the potion.

"I'll count from five to one. When I'm done you'll wake up and won't remember anything we did once we left the Manor grounds. Five..." Harry started counting, "four...three..." Fred looked groggy, "two...one" Harry clapped his hands.

Like suddenly awakened Fred looked around. "Who made all this mess?"

Harry sighed in relief. He realized he had just killed a man just for the fun of it. No matter it was a Death Eater and certainly it served the purpose of shaking and frightening Voldemort's followers, it was still a horrible crime and Harry didn't want Fred to carry the burden of guilt, too.

---

"Malfoy!"

"Lord Malfoy, Severus!" Lucius' dry arrogant voice matched the expression on his face, as the two wizards glared daggers at each other.

"Not anymore." Snape quickly retorted.

"More than you think. I have more to offer to any side than you ever will, Severus."

Harry was standing in the backroom of a pub. Lucius and Snape were facing each other over the table. Harry was exhausted after the night spent with Bellatrix and the morning chase. Suddenly he felt he had to go to sleep. Usually it meant that there was something important and related to him happening. Only he didn't feel it since the last "meeting" with Voldemort. He thought that Voldemort had put some wards onto him and everyone connected to him and Harry.

"How is your charming Mudblood girlfriend?" Lucius continued sarcastically. "You always fell for Mudbloods, Severus? Of course you don't really expect to get a pedigree by breeding two mutts, do you?"

"How dare you?" Snape roared.

"Oh you must have knocked her off her feet with your famous Snape style: Greasy hair and dandruff on your shoulders."

Snape's eyes narrowed and both wizards had their hands on their wands for a couple of seconds.

"I'm here for better reason than to listen your insults, Malfoy!"

"Oh yes, I almost forgot." Lucius sneered. He didn't like the idea of reporting to Snape so he tried his best to do everything to assert himself as superior and above him. Not having any further reaction from Snape he continued.

"Most of Death Eaters fear the Dark Lord more than anything else in the world. Before he shows a sign of weakness none of them will betray him. Though I heard rumours that old Ambrosias Duncan was burnt alive and that there was a Dark Mark above his house. Only a true Death Eater can cast the Dark Mark. The Duncans will not like it and they might activate their alliances. I'll let your master know as soon as I discover more."

"Fudge isn't my master any more than yours!"

"We'll see about that. You better be careful where your allegiance is, Severus!"

---

Harry woke up. He felt terribly exhausted. After summoning enough power to get up, he took the dreamcatcher and collapsed into his bed.

It was already dark when Harry was woken by the banging on the door.

"Master, master, the guests have arrived!"

"Show them in, Polly. I'll join them in a few minutes." He got up from the bed and looked for his clothes. He found only old-fashioned ceremonial robes. "Polly." He muttered and with a sigh of resignation got himself dressed and rushed downstairs.

The lounge was full and noisy. George was retelling Fred Madam Pomfrey's "seduction" to everyone's delight. Even Madam Pomfrey laughed. "He exaggerates!" She repeated several times.

"Oh Harry, we've all been waiting for you!" Hermione exclaimed and ran to hug him, but was stopped by sudden silence in the room. Everybody looked at Harry and then at Sirius and then at Harry again, like they were watching an invisible tennis ball passing between the two wizards. Nobody let out a sound expecting something to happen.

"Your Lordship," Sirius inclined his head "thank you for inviting us into your home." There was no sarcasm in his voice.

"Sirius, this will always be your home! I...I've just got a job to do."

"No Harry, you're the rightful lord of the Land. You earned it. And the job you've got...It's for a lifetime." Then he grinned. "I'm happy you're all right!"

"I'm so happy to see you all. Welcome!" Harry greeted them and then he turned to Sirius again. "Oh, there is one favour I have to ask you."

"Yes."

"Please order Kreacher to never, ever touch any of my house-elves, especially Polly. She is the head house elf in this home. Could you do that for me?"

"Certainly, though I don't understand why ..." but he stopped when he met Hermione's eye.

"Great, let's have dinner, and then you can all get some rest."

"Rest! I won't rest until my granddaughters are safe!" Moody thundered.

"I have a plan." Harry responded calmly.

"You have a plan!" Moody retorted, but before Harry could answer the sudden feeling of coldness pervaded the room. Despite the fact that the feeling wasn't too strong, Harry gave the signal to Polly who turned off the lights with a wave of her hand. Some of them rushed to the window. They could see three spooky silhouettes floating around the pond and greenhouse.

"Dementors!" Hermione whispered.

"Not on my land!" Harry hissed. He took snuff-box and sniffed. This time he took less of the powder than he had before.

"Fred take this and let's go! Polly, you know what to do when we're back."

"Harry, what are you going to do?" Hermione exclaimed.

Without answering Harry kicked off of the ground and flew over the manor followed by Fred.

"*Cheerio!*" They exchanged spells as they approached Dementors. Harry didn't feel cheerful. He had to do something fast. Holding his Firebolt with his left hand he sniffed more of the powder. The landscape beneath him started to sparkle.

"*Cheerio!*" He pointed his wand to Fred. "Cheer me now Fred!" The purple ray hit him and suddenly he felt energized.

"*Purple ray, purple ray. I only want to see you laughing in the purple ray!*" Harry sang as he loomed closer to the Dementor. "*Cheerio!*" The creature let a horrible inhuman cry of pain.

"He liked it Fred! Let's give him some more! *Cheerio!*" But the Dementor ducked and the ray missed him by inches and it started fleeing. The other two were already out of sight, most likely deterred by Harry's action.

"You can run, but you can't hide!" Harry was singing chasing it on his Firebolt. Then he dived in the Wronski Faint, turned sharply around the giant tree and appeared just in front of the Dementor.

"*Cheerio!*" This time the ray hit it into the chest and The Dementor started falling. Harry followed him singing "*Dementor is falling down, falling down...*"

"Cheer up lad!" He said when he landed next to the motionless body. Fred finally caught up. The purple ray illuminated the garden once more and the creature gave a final twitch, before it started dissolving in front of their eyes. For a brief moment its face gained almost human form and its lips mouthed "Thank you!" and then a sudden whirl blew its remains away.

"You're welcome!" Harry bowed theatrically. "Have you seen this Fred? Fred?" Harry sobered in a second. "FRED!"

"Hey, what's up doc?" Fred emerged from the nearby bushes. "Where are the others?"

"I had enough fun for tonight!" Harry was grumpy again. They slowly flew towards the manor.

The others were waiting for them on the balcony trying to see what was going on in the garden. As Harry and Fred approached McGonagall reprimanded Harry impatiently.

"It would behoove you young man to tell us exactly what all this was about!"

With his eyes still shining Harry answered nonchalantly "We've just destroyed the Dementor!" He didn't see what everyone was making a big deal about. Harry wanted McGonagall to feel the same happiness but felt it wouldn't be wise to offer her some of his powder.

"Actually Harry did, professor!" Added Fred.

"The Dementors can't be killed!" Moody retorted.

Harry managed to calm down a little. "Oh yes they can. It seems they were people once and then were turned into whatever they are now by some evil magic. Once the evil was dispelled they are free to die."

Nobody broke the silence for sometime.

"So that's your plan to save the children from Azkaban?"

"Yes."

"And you aim to destroy all Dementors one by one single-handedly!"

"Fred and George will help me. It's too dangerous to involve any other!"

"Nothing is too dangerous for me!" Moody protested.

"I'm afraid that only Fred and George can handle what it takes to go after Dementors."

"And what are the others supposed to do?"

"They will meet with all parents and relatives of children that were captured. We'll need every wand we can get. I'll also need some of you to watch my back while I'm dealing with the Dementors."

"You're talking like you're the new commander." Moody remarked.

"I'm the Protector of the Land. The invaders are just across the Channel waiting for the signal to launch the attack. We have no time to lose. Those that will fly with me tomorrow better get some rest."

Harry left the room. He was still light-headed, though he didn't want to taste Sha's potion for the second time in the same day. All he wanted was to get some rest.

"*Bella!*" The thought struck him like thunder. He wondered whether she would come. He hoped she would, but at the same time feared he would throw himself before her feet. "*Nemesis! I could spend the night as Nemesis. Nemesis can resist any woman.*" But he didn't. He put his dreamcatcher above his head and fell into sleep, hoping that it wouldn't be Polly that would wake him up.

---

For the first time since the night Hermione left Sirius' quarters leaving nothing but the note, she and Sirius were finally alone.

"We never had a date, did we?" He asked grinning enigmatically.

"Not really."

"Come on." He rushed her outside. Hermione followed him through the garden to the small shed. Sirius opened the door. "*Lumos.*" They were standing in the garage full of all sort of junk that can be found in any Muggle's garage. In the middle of all that mess was an old fashioned motorbike covered with a thick layer of dust. With a tap of his wand Sirius cleaned the bike and then he took the leather jacket and blue jeans from a chest.

"You still have your Muggle clothes with you? I'm too well known in wizarding world."

Hermione nodded. "Yes but..."

"Yes?" He asked tightening his belt.

"Where are we going?"

"We're going out for dinner."

"On this?" She pointed at the motorbike.

"Yes."

"Can't we just apparate?"

"Apparate? You know it's risky." Sirius finished with changing his clothes. Hermione thought he was even more handsome in tight jeans and leather jacket.

"Don't tell me you're afraid."

Hermione hesitated.

"You are afraid. Hermione, the witch that survived the Killing Curse, escaped from Hogwarts, the one that flew over the Atlantic Ocean, deterred the Dementors and escaped in front of Voldemort's nose?"

"Sounds silly I know. Only..."

"Yes?"

"Only the popular girls dated bikers. You know what I mean."



"No I don't."

"I persuaded myself it was too dangerous anyways."

"Hermione, do you trust me?"

"Yes."

"There is nothing you should worry about. And for me, you are the most popular and the most beautiful girl in the world!"

"Oh Sirius, I love you so much!" He looked at her with his soft black eyes. They were telling her everything she wanted to hear from him.

"I suppose it means we have a date?" He mounted his bike. Hermione sat behind him holding him tight, laying her cheek on his back. The next instant the engine roared and they lifted to the air.

---

"Surprise!" Bellatrix was sitting on his bed completely naked. She was lit by the blue flame coming from the black candle in her hand. In the other hand she had a cup. "You don't want to drink wine from this one."

Harry jumped up. His throat became dry the moment he saw her sitting there and he didn't understand a word of what she was talking about. Silently she stood up.

"It was in the Lestrange vault. It was so easy. Of course I couldn't use the Polyjuice potion and impersonate my dear husband, but I had the key, and his cloak and the wig did the trick. Oh yes, poor Rodolphus was as bald as the moon." She sighed ironically. "Anyways, not even goblins dare to question Lestranges."

"What are you talking about?"

"This is your second Horcrux. The only one Riddle didn't move. It's yours if you promise me something."

"Promise what?"

"Riddle is looking for something. A stone. Promise me that if you find it before him, you'll use it on me."

"Why would I look for it?"

"Because Tom Riddle will!"

"Why does he want it?"

"Because he thinks he can use it against you."

"Can he?"

"Perhaps. Promise me, and I'll help you defeat him!"

"Is that all?"

"No. You'll have to satisfy my thirst and my lust until you find the stone. You'll tell no one about us and our agreement."

Harry couldn't think clearly. She obviously knew something very secret, very powerful. He had to know what. He regretted he hadn't visited his parents and asked them about Bellatrix. He thought of it, but the feeling of shame and guilt prevailed. Harry couldn't tell them about him and Bellatrix. Ever. Even if he knew they had known that already.

"I'll answer you tomorrow." He finally spoke.

"You have to answer me tonight." She answered in her cool voice. "Or you'll never find the cup nor see me again." Bellatrix put the cup and the candle on the night table. Then she slowly mounted Harry who was still lying in his bed. She looked at him for a few seconds running her hand over his chest. "I can try to persuade you." She whispered. She leant forward slowly reaching Harry's lips. He couldn't resist kissing her back. He couldn't resist her. Not her lips, not her breasts. He felt her skin rubbing against his. It was so soft. When they finally broke from the kiss he said breathlessly "I promise," and they rolled in the bed their limbs entangled.

## Chapter 4 – Soul Survivor

Hermione and Sirius were riding on his motorcycle down Park Lane. "Are you taking me to Buckingham Palace?" she asked.

"Would you like to?" Sirius asked laughing. "It could be arranged, though you gave me quite short notice!"

"No! I mean yes, but not tonight! Will you tell me where we're going?"

"You'll see! We're almost there!" He shouted as the engine roared accelerating.

Sirius stopped the motor in front of the Hard Rock café.

"You can't park your bike here!" Hermione whispered.

"I know." Sirius answered. He dismounted his bike and pulled it a few yards forward. Hermione saw Sirius' wand appear in his hand for a split second and the bike vanished. "For Muggles it seems like I rode on it around the corner." He said with a smile. It was obvious that this wasn't the first time he'd done that trick.

On their way into the café Sirius was greeted by several members of the staff. One of them showed them to their table. Hermione realized that though she lived in London all her life, she never even thought about coming to the Hard Rock Café. She looked at all those famous guitars and other items on the walls with plaques below them. In every corner was a TV screen. It felt like some sort of rock temple.

"How do you like it?" Sirius asked.

"I love it!"

"I always liked Muggle music. It's so exotic." They heard piano followed by a slow guitar solo. "Wayfaring Pilgrim" Sirius said "One of my favorites. That's how I feel about this place. They don't usually play it, but they know tonight is a special occasion."

When they finished their order the song ended and they saw the figure of Angus Young playing guitar in front of a huge crowd on the screen in front of them. It was difficult to talk so they enjoyed their dinner looking at each other. Hermione couldn't believe she was there. She felt like everybody knew it was her first time going out for a date, and that she didn't really belong to a place like that, with the escort like Sirius.

"You look tense?" Sirius noticed the expression on her face.

"I'm worried someone could see us." Hermione lied.

"I want the whole world to see us!" He replied. They fell silent again as the music went on

*"...And it seems to me that you lived your life,*

*like a candle in the wind,*

*never knowing who to cling to,*

*when the rain set in..."*

"You can always cling to me, my princess." Sirius said softly. He put his hand onto hers. "I heard your Patronus looks like a dog?"

"Yes?"

"You know I'm an Animagus?"

"Yes, everybody knows that."

"You've never seen me, have you?"

"What is this all about?" Hermione was starting to sound irritated.

"How is it that your Patronus looks like me in my Animagi form, when you never saw it?"

Hermione looked like she'd had an electric shock. Her eyes narrowed ominously and the smile disappeared from her face.

"You! You took me here to interrogate me. Is that all you wanted from me? To find out my secrets? If you really loved me you'd know why my Patronus looked like you. It used to be an otter, and I hope it will be next time. You...you." Hermione could hardly hold the tears. She wrenched her hand away.

"No! It's not what you think. I've never felt like this in my entire life." Sirius desperately tried to explain.

"Just take me out of here!" Hermione stood up. The whole café was spinning around her. Sirius left the money on the table and rushed after her.

"Hermione!" He caught up with her outside. "I'm sorry. Let's go home."

"Home? We have no home!" She shrieked. Then she realized that she was so close to her home, her parents. "Yes, that's where I'm going. It's about time I took care of my parents!"

"I'll take you there!"

"No thank you! I think I can manage to find a way home in my own city!"

"You're not going to Apparate are you?"

"No. I'll take the Tube."

"As you wish." He gave her one last look before turning and walking away.

A few minutes later Hermione was in her seat. She realized she was wet and cold. She couldn't use her wand in front of all those Muggles. She smiled bitterly. At least she knew she couldn't be mugged.

The Island Gardens station was almost empty when she came out. She rushed toward her home when she saw a familiar motorcycle in the archway.

"Sirius!"

"Guilty as charged!"

"How did you know where I lived?"

"I have my sources."

"So you knew all along?"

"All I need to know is that I love you. That's all that matters." Actually Sirius didn't have a clue. He found the address in a Muggle phonebook when he heard Hermione's parents were dentists. At least it was clear to him that she was hiding something big. He knew he would have to take his time to find out what it was.

"If you found them so can Fudge!" Hermione whispered. "Sirius, we have to modify their memories and implant them a thought to go to my aunt's in Australia!"

---

Wormtail was looking at the two senior Aurors in front of him. "What do you mean they left early?" He snapped in his squeaky voice. "You had more than half hour to make an ambush and now you tell me they simply walked away. All the months of surveillance for nothing! You idiots!"

"But they didn't use magic. We lost them in the crowd. The Mudblood knows how to act like a Muggle." The older of the two Aurors spoke.

"I don't have time for your excuses! Call in every Auror in London. I want the whole city blocked. I want every magic investigated. I want a curfew- no magic until the morning, no Apparition except with special permission! Shut down the Floo Network! Do you understand?"

---

Mr. Granger jumped from his chair when he heard the doorbell. Every time he heard it, he couldn't help hoping that it was Hermione.

"Who is it?" He spoke into the interphone.

"It's me, dad!"

"Hermione!" Mr. Granger tried to open the door forgetting to remove the chain. Then he realised he had to let them into the building. Completely confused by the surprise visit he finally pressed the button to let her in and somehow opened the door.

Hermione rushed to hug him.

"Oh where have you been my little pumpkin? Where have you been all this time? I was so worried." Then he noticed the man in a leather jacket standing in the hallway.

"And I suppose you're Harry?" Mr. Granger said in an intimidating voice.

"No Dad, it's Sirius!"

"How do you mean serious? It can't be. It's too soon."

"No sir. It's my name. Sirius Black. It's an honor to meet you at last." Sirius extended his hand.

"So you two are not..."

"Oh yes, we are going to get married, only not just yet."

"Where's Mum?" Hermione desperately tried to divert the conversation.

"Well you know Mum. She's sleeping in front of the telly. She didn't hear the doorbell."

"What is it Eric?"

"Mum!" Hermione ran to hug a woman coming from the living room.

"Hermione dear. Why didn't you call?" Mrs. Granger said through her tears.

"I love you Mum!" Hermione cried as well. "And you Dad!"

Sirius stood awkwardly looking at the Granger family hugging in silence.

"Mum, this is my...my..."

"Fiancé," Sirius finished. "It's a pleasure to meet you ma'am."

With her eyes full of tears Hermione used the moment when both Grangers were looking at Sirius and pulled out her wand.

"Obliviate!"

As her parents fell into some sort of trance she focused on imprinting the new "memories". Sirius swished his wand several times and the fully loaded travel bags floated into the anteroom.

"They'll wake up in a few minutes and take the car to France. There they'll spend two weeks, book the tickets and leave for Australia. Mum always loved Paris." Hermione sighed then took one last look at them.

"Come on Hermione. You mustn't be here when they wake up." He literally dragged her outside. They mounted the bike and Sirius took them from the close down the archway.

He needed a convenient place to lift into the air. Unfortunately the street was full of people. He stopped at the traffic light. The next moment they were surrounded by four couples, apparently drunk. The girls were of Hermione's age, with heavy make-up and rings in their eyebrows and lips.

"Look who's there! Hermione the loony!"

"Oh, is this your new shrink! He's so cute!"

"Stop it Antonia!" Hermione snapped.

"Oh, you better watch it Antonia" A blonde girl laughed "She could bite you!"

"Leave her alone you little freaks!" Sirius roared.

"Who did you call freak?" A fat boy with a piggish face pushed Sirius' bike with his leg. Sirius hardly kept his balance when two other boys pushed him from the other side. As he fell the pigface drove his knee into his ear. He took Sirius by the hair and elbowed him furiously followed by the others. The girls giggled triumphantly.

"Leave him alone you monsters!" Hermione screamed. She took her wand from her sleeve. At that moment they pressed Sirius' face against the engine. Hermione heard the scorching sound and smelt the burning skin. She tried to help him but the girls blocked her way tittering, pinching her and pulling her hair. She felt enormous anger boiling in her as she stood there helplessly. Obviously unconscious, Sirius didn't let out a sound. And then it happened. Hermione's wand energized in her hand. She could feel the heat and the mighty vibration going up her arm. The next instant the flash of blue light lit the scene and the four boys shrunk and turned into half rats as big as terriers. Their humanoid faces were even more distorted in the grimace of utter horror as they realized what had happened. The girls screamed through their toothless mouths as their skin wrinkled and their hair turned gray. They humped down the street as fast as they could without turning back. Still shaking Hermione tried to pull herself together. She knew that this kind of magic in front of Muggles couldn't pass unnoticed. She cast *Renervate* and the healing spell on Sirius. It took several attempts before he could get on his feet, still bleeding from his ear.

"We must get out of here!" Hermione shouted, but as Sirius was trying to start the engine they heard cracking sounds all over. Wormtail's Aurors surrounded them in a large number and some of them were still coming.

"Close your eyes!" Hermione hissed before the Aurors could orient and through the powder from her pocket onto the ground. The powder produced a flash of light so blindingly bright that all Aurors were stunned for a few seconds unable to see. It gave Hermione enough time to cast *Disillusionment* charm on Sirius, herself and the bike. Sirius finally started the engine and they surged up in the air.

Sirius maneuvered his motorbike through the group of Aurors knocking a few of them to the ground. There was a field and across the street without lights and he tried to lose his pursuers flying low through the darkness. There were more Aurors coming on their broomsticks and they obviously heard the sound of his engine. Hermione was just about to cast the *Imperturbable Charm* when Aurors barraged them with *Specialis Revelio* apparently trying to make them clearly visible again. So Hermione cast *Protego* instead. The shield deflected spells but by that time they were in the street lights again and their shadow betrayed their location. Sirius steered up trying to take cover between tall dark-glass buildings and gain the altitude.

"Hold on Hermione!" He yelled turning around the corner of the building when two blasts shattered the windows on the sky-scrapers on their sides.

"PROTEGO!" Hermione put the shield in front of them as they flew through the debris of broken glass. The next moment she felt terrible pain in her back as the glass particles pierced her skin and ripped her flesh. She realised all too late that they used some sort of *Wasi* spell to direct the broken glass from behind like shrapnel. She was only dimly aware of the blood on the bike. She felt herself losing consciousness. The pain grew greater and greater. The last thing she did before passing out was to cast *Petrificus Totalis* onto herself in order to make sure she wouldn't fall from the bike. This gave Sirius enough time to accelerate and after another sharp turn gained enough speed to leave their pursuers behind. He felt Hermione's motionless body behind him.

"Hold on Hermione, just hold on!" He cried through tears. For the first time in his life Sirius was praying. He prayed to every force he knew not to come to Blackdown Manor too late.

---

The green light flashed behind the heavy curtains in Harry's bedroom. Bellatrix looked at Harry emotionlessly as he returned her the cup. She was sitting at the edge of the bed, only half-dressed, with her long black hair streaming down her back.

"I guess you can drink wine from it now." Harry said.

"I don't drink wine this early." She retorted.

"How come you always come at night and disappear afterwards?" Harry asked.

"I'm going back to my Voldy. Even he must sleep sometimes." Bellatrix replied cynically. "He believes I'm spying on you for him."

"Are you?"

"For him? Never."

"You know, I think you care only for yourself pitting him and me against each other. You're helping me only because you think I'm weaker than him."

"Yes, that makes much more sense now. I want to benefit myself by helping you, the one who killed me, because you are weak and less likely to win. Everything fits, doesn't it?" Bellatrix was sardonic now.

"How do I know the cup was a Horcrux?"

"Why don't you check how your little sister is? If it was really a Horcrux she must be better by now."

*"Rose! She knows about Rose!"* Harry thought in a panic. Like she was reading his mind Bellatrix added flatly

"It's a nice little hospital there in Massachusetts. She couldn't be taken better care of anywhere in the world." She paused, waiting for him to comprehend the fact that she knew where Rose was.

"How do you know?" Harry finally asked. He felt like he was punched into the stomach. He couldn't have known that at that same moment one redheaded girl in a small hospital in Boston opened her doe-like eyes, smiled for a moment and then fell into sleep.

"I have my sources." She answered. "Don't worry; my dear Dark Lord doesn't have a clue, though he's trying hard to find her. Needless to say he'd give a great reward to those who do it for him."

"He really wants to get me, doesn't he?"

"Of course he does. Almost as much as he wants to bring the lost part of his soul back to him."

"What do you mean?"



"Tom Riddle stored a part of his soul into every Horcrux he made. When you killed the Horcrux, you released that part into the underworld, where it's waiting for the new-born baby to rejoin. He'll try to find the baby and get his soul back."

"By killing the child?" Harry jumped from the bed and started pacing nervously.

"Well it has never been a problem for him, has it?"

"I have to stop him! How can he find the child?"

"The answer lies in the Realm of the Dead. But you might consider the safety of your sister first. He's got a far better chance to find her than a baby that can be anywhere in the world and it might not have been born yet."

"I've got to..." but before Harry could finish his sentence a loud crack followed by the sound of the roaring engine broke the silence of Blackdown Manor.

"Somebody help me!" Sirius was desperately crying for help. "Madam Pomfrey, anybody!"

Harry rushed from his bedroom putting his robes on, on the way down. The scene he saw took his breath away. Harry felt the blood drain from his face. There was a motorbike with Sirius and Hermione in the middle of the lounge. Sirius apparently flew right through the balcony door that was hanging from the broken hinges. Sirius' face was all in cuts and bruises and Hermione was petrified behind him with her arms tightly around Sirius' body. As he ran downstairs, Harry realised that Hermione's Muggle clothes and hair were completely drenched in blood.

Suddenly the lounge was full of people. Harry pushed his way towards Sirius and Hermione only to find that Madam Pomfrey was already there. He looked around. The others had noticed it too. An abrupt silence fell over the room, as she removed the Petrificus Totalis. Hermione gasped in pain. The wound started bleeding again, but Madam Pomfrey quickly cast a few spells and it stopped. Sirius gathered her up in his arms and they made their way to the room that was being used as a Hospital Wing, followed by Harry.

"Is she going to be all right?" Asked Alicia Snippet. She was Madam Pomfrey's assistant. Next to her Angelina was crying.

Soon they were in the Hospital Wing, where Madam Pomfrey cast diagnostic charms on Hermione and gave her some potions. Hermione was barely conscious, and Sirius kept mumbling that it was all his fault. Harry had never felt so helpless in his life. His best friend might be dying and there was nothing he could do.

"Smart girl." Madam Pomfrey muttered. "With wounds like these you'd have bled to death without that spell." Then she turned to Sirius and others. "She lost more than half of her blood. I must give her Blood Replenishing potion at once. Then I'll take care of her wounds. Alicia, give me the potion please."

Alicia took the vial from the shelf and gave it to Madam Pomfrey. With her eyes closed and obviously in pain, Hermione barely swallowed the potion.

"You must be brave my dear. I couldn't give you the Replenishing Potion and pain killers at the same time. I'll take the glass from your wounds now and put on bandages."

Harry never saw someone working with her wand so fast like Madam Pomfrey. One after another, bloody pieces of glass ended in the small bucket besides the surgery table. Alicia was

pressing Hermione's wounds making sure she wouldn't lose any more blood. With every piece taken from her flesh Hermione twitched a little. It was obvious from her face that she suffered from enormous pain. But she didn't let out a sound. The only visible reaction was that she squeezed Sirius' hand a few times. After twenty minutes Madam Pomfrey sighed in relief.

"It's all done. Now we'll have to wait for the potion to take effect. You are the bravest patient I ever had, Hermione Granger." Madam Pomfrey's voice was gentle and her eyes full of tears. Then she pulled herself together and regaining her usual strict manner commanded "Now you all must leave. Alicia will stay in case Hermione needs anything. I'll look at your wounds now, young man!" She said firmly turning to Sirius.

Harry returned to the lounge. He knew he couldn't go back to sleep. Hermione was fighting for dear life. She was hurt and he wasn't there to protect her. *"I'll stay here and ask Sirius what happened. Bella must be gone by now anyways."* He thought. But Polly was there looking for him.

"Master, master." She whispered. "Master must come with Polly. Some people are waiting to see master."

"Not now Polly. I can't see anyone now." He answered impatiently.

"Master better come. Master told Polly always tell master everything. It is very urgent."

"All right, all right." Harry followed his house elf outside. They went around the building that seemed much larger to Harry than it used to be. Polly led the way with the small lantern.

The north wing of Blackdown Manor had been closed for a long time. Harry was resident of the manor too short to even think about asking or exploring what was in there. It looked somehow queer with its small windows and tall tower full of arrow slits, rough dark stone walls and a long and narrow archway to the interior. The archway itself was guarded from the outside by a massive gate whose ornament when looked from the distance resembled the image of a dragon ready to attack. The whole wing was somehow disconnected from the rest of the building like it was a separate entity.

"Polly, I don't remember seeing it before."

"Of course master. The manor seems like an ordinary summerhouse to strangers. Only the true owner, members of the family and trusted friends can see it. As the Lands sees it fit."

"Of course, the Land. How could I forget? Now, who are those mysterious people I have to see so urgently?"

"This way master." Polly opened the gate and they walked through the archway into the courtyard. The five people stood there. Harry couldn't see them clearly before Polly came closer.

They had emaciated, partially decomposing bodies. They were dressed in rags, and the amount of filth, dried blood and vomit on their figures was unbelievable. Their pale, wrinkled skin was full of popped veins and old, festering wounds that were crawling with worms and maggots.

It took Harry several minutes to compose himself. When he did, he saw that the people were kneeling before him, bowing their heads.

"My Liege!" they spoke synchronously.

"Who are you? Why did you call me Liege?"

"My name is Cassius, my Liege, and this is my brother Sejanus. Our souls were taken by Dementors more than four hundred years ago. You released them to join our rotten bodies. We are bound to serve you or die at the first act of disloyalty."

Harry looked at them more closely. In spite of the fact that their faces were terribly decayed Harry noticed the close resemblance between the brothers. They both had long silvery hair and cold light-blue eyes.

"And how long will your allegiance last?"

"As long as we live, my Liege. It cannot be broken!"

"And what did you do to deserve such harsh punishment?"

"The three of us were sent to England to assassinate Queen Elizabeth Tudor. Our third brother, Lucius, betrayed us before we could accomplish our mission. We trusted him with our lives; we did everything together, the Lombardi triplets from Lugano. He betrayed us for the love of Lady Malfoy, who he married and denounced his own name and family."

Harry knew he needed more time to comprehend what he had just heard. He turned to an older couple kneeling on his left. "And who are you?"

"I'm Emily and this is my husband Archie, my Liege. We were small thieves and smugglers from the docks. Nothing serious indeed." The old woman spoke like she was still on trial.

"It's never been heard of that ordinary thieves were sentenced to Dementor kiss." Polly interrupted.

"We used magic to fool Muggle's customs for gold!" The old man spoke. "I was in a terrible debt. I owed a lot of gold to bookmakers, my Liege."

"And you?" Harry asked the woman that was dressed in rags that seemed like it was a beautiful ball dress once.

"My name is Cecile. I lived in Paris when he came and promised me the world. I believed him. I believed him when he said he would get me from that filthy place I was in. I gave him my heart!"

"You gave him more than that!" Archie sneered just to be elbowed by his wife. "Forgive me my Liege." He bowed.

"Continue Cecile." Harry said.

"I spend all of my savings to come to England and find him. He was coming out of the Norwich Cathedral with his bride when I killed him in front of his Muggle family and friends. It would be one hundred years next year if You, my Liege didn't save me from eternal torment."

"Polly, how come that they can see this place and my friends can't?"

"Oh master, it's a mystery to me as well. It must be that the Land knows they must be loyal to you and treat them as trusted, like family."

"Trusted!" Cecile cried. "How can thieves be trusted, let alone assassins. Never trust the twins my Liege! They are infamous in the Underworld for their deeds. They are snakes!"

"But they're my snakes now." Harry responded coldly, surprising even himself. "Polly, take what's needed from the hospital wing and the potions in the cellar. Make sure they are well fed and recover as soon as possible. The war is inevitable and I will need every help I can get."

"War!" Archie cried. "My Liege, Emily and I are old and sick people. Can we support your struggle from the rear? If you need to spy on somebody or to smuggle stuff or carry a message? After all, we're thieves!"

"I'll tell you what I expect from you when the time comes!" Harry dismissed them with a slight wave of his hand. He had to think. These people were kissed and their souls released from the Realm of the Dead when he destroyed the Dementor that kissed them. *"It's a matter of destroying the right Dementor. That's all that takes to have my parents again! Maybe they know how to find that Dementor!"* He thought fervently. He turned back catching up with Polly and others inside the tower. On his way in he ran into Neville who fell on the floor.

"Who are you? Where am I?" Neville asked. Harry saw utter fear in his eyes. The slave girl that was with Neville still stood there showing no sign of any emotion.

"I'm Harry Potter and you are safe now. Nobody will hurt you again Neville, do you hear me? Nobody!" Harry looked upstairs. "Polly!" He shouted.

"Yes master."

"Neville will join my other guests. Take care of that when you finish with our new friends. Neville you're coming with me."

The way back to the main entrance was even longer since Neville couldn't walk that fast. Harry didn't want to hurry him, though he couldn't wait to gather the squad and raid Azkaban looking for Dementors to kill. *"There must be hundreds of them. How will I ever find those that kissed mum and dad?"*

When he entered the lounge he found Angelina in tears.

"What happened?"

"Hermione!" Angelina cried. "She's dying!"

Harry stormed to the hospital wing. Alicia and McGonagall were struggling with Sirius who wanted to go in.

"I have to see her. It's all my fault, my entire fault! It should be me dying in there, not her!"

"What happened?" Harry asked.

"Hermione is allergic to an ingredient in the Replenishing Potion. Her own blood turned into a poison. I stabilized her for now, but she'll die if we don't find a blood donor." Madam Pomfrey explained as she closed the door behind her. "Alicia, you go in there and keep an eye on Hermione. I have to look into my logs."

"Take mine!" Sirius cried, "Take as much as you need!"

"I'm afraid it isn't possible. She has a very rare type of blood, and it is RhD negative, as well. Regrettably, none of you can be the blood donor. I have my Hogwarts logs with me and I'll search for someone suitable. We'll have to find that person today, or it will be too late." She opened the thick book with leather covers and searched through it for a few minutes that seemed like an eternity to everyone in the room.

"Here, I have only one suitable donor in the log. But mind you, in the wizarding world it must be a willing donor or the magical portion of the blood won't fit."

"Who is it?" Sirius asked breathlessly. All eyes were pointed at Madam Pomfrey in total silence. Madam Pomfrey closed the book and looked at Sirius for a few seconds like she was afraid to answer his question. Then she finally spoke.

"Severus Snape."

## Chapter 5 – Vows

*He had been spending the weekend with his friend Marcus Flint. It was his mother's idea. She thought it might take his mind off things. While the boys had the whole afternoon to themselves, three hours of every morning were spent practicing the Dark Arts on the slaves.*

*Draco stood pressed against the wall, with his hands in his pockets, and a bored expression on his face. These lessons were so stupid! It was completely pointless to practice curses on servants. It wasn't like they could defend themselves. They might as well have been performing on dolls.*

*Flint on the other hand enjoyed these lessons. Draco was beginning to wonder whether the dark-haired former Slytherin was mad.*

*"Are you going to do anything?" Flint asked after lifting a hex of a small boy. The child's face turned back to its usual expressionless mask.*

*"No," Draco yawned. "I could do these curses by heart." Flint shrugged and cast the Cruciatus Curse on the slave, who began to scream. Draco looked away.*

*But the curse stopped as soon as it started. Draco looked up. Flint was staring at the other slave in the room. She was a girl of maybe fifteen, sixteen pale and thin. However she was still very beautiful.*

*Flint approached her, tilting her chin up. He slowly started to slide his hand down her neck to her breasts. Then Draco exploded.*

*"For Merlin's sake Marcus," He snapped. "Can't you find a conscious girl to molest? At least lift the curse before you rape her."*

*Flint removed his hand. "You're jealous Malfoy. You're wishing your slaves looked like this" Draco nearly rolled at Flint's stupidity. He was Draco Malfoy. He could have any girl he wanted.*

*Then his smile disappeared. In a couple of weeks, he might be dead. It was all his father's fault. His father was the one responsible for the book or diary or whatever it was. He should be the one suffering for it. Draco had never loved his father, but now he hated him.*

*He was so lost in his thoughts that he hadn't noticed that Marcus had left the room. Through the window, Draco saw him flying around outside. Draco's words had struck a cord. Flint was never a ladies man. Remembering his own words he got an idea. Grabbing the girl, he Apparated to the guest bedroom. He cast a Cleaning Charm and a healing charm. The he muttered another spell. This one would remove the Enslavement Curse.*

*The girl's eyes lost their glazed look. They stared at each other for a moment, and when he opened his mouth to speak, she burst into tears. She backed away from him until she was in a corner, where she curled up, rocking and sobbing.*

*Draco was at a loss. He had no idea what to do. Quickly, he cast a silencing spell around the room. He knelt down beside her, at which she cried harder.*

*"I won't hurt you," he said, in what he hoped was a gentle tone. She continued crying, gasping someone's name, but her words were so garbled that he wasn't sure whose. After a while, she fell silent, though tears still streamed down her face. Draco snapped his fingers and called "Dobby!"*

*The house-elf appeared in the middle of the guest bedroom. Draco ordered him to food and the potion. "Now!" He roared when the elf didn't move. The girl flinched but thankfully remained silent.*

*When Dobby returned, Draco told her too drink the potion. "It makes you feel numb. So that if you're injured, or being tortured-" here she winced and Draco cursed his insensitivity- "you don't feel it. It helps against the Cruciatus Curse, but not completely." She finished drinking. "Eat." She obeyed. Her large, dark eyes were full of fear.*

*"Better?" He asked. Draco didn't know why he was helping her, but he knew that this poor, slave girl interested him more than any of the pretty girls in Hogwarts. She had something they didn't. She nodded then slowly voice trembling, "Yes."*

*Draco hated the look in her eyes. He hated the thought of what Flint must have done to her. In that moment, he decided that he would never follow the Dark Lord. The Dark Lord was the reason she was abused.*

*"My name is Draco Malfoy. Who are you?"*

*She spoke in a small, faltering voice. "I am..."*

Somebody shook him awake. Draco stared into the darkness trying to see who it was. They were in the small igloo. Draco was in his "bed" made of animal furs covered with a heavy blanket. The small space was filled with five more bodies all squished together to keep warm. His visitor crawled in through the narrow passage still having his legs outside. Draco heard him muttering a spell and the next moment the igloo was lit by the faint light of their tallow-candle. Other men were still in a deep sleep, obviously charmed by the uninvited guest.

"You're Draco Malfoy, aye?" The mysterious man finally spoke.

"Yes." Draco whispered.

"My name is Noel. Your father sent me to get you home."

"My father knows we're here?"

"You better get ready now, or we'll miss the tide."

"Miss the tide?" Draco exclaimed.

"Hush. Keep your voice down."

A minute later they were outside. The freezing wind stubbed particles of icy rain into their faces. A woman in furs stood there waiting.

"Where are we going?" Draco shouted, in order to be heard.

"Haven't you forgotten something, Noel?" The woman asked.

Draco flinched realizing it wasn't his mother.

"All right, all right, we'll get the boy's mother, too!" He replied. "Where is she?" He asked Draco.

Draco pointed to the igloo next to his. "In there!"

"All right Patricia, it's the women's dormitory. You better go!"

"And you better wait!"

"So you know my father?"

"Nope!"

"But you said he sent you?"

"In a manner of speaking. Actually he made a deal with my nephew, Ryan and Ryan sent me."

"He paid Ryan? That bastard got us into this in the first place! And what about my mother?"

"She wasn't part of the deal. Patricia insisted we take her as well!"

"You were going to leave her here?" Draco was completely shocked. But before they could continue Sha and Narcissa appeared from the igloo.

"Let's go."

They made their way through the blizzard to the other side of the hill, where a sled with three horses was waiting.

"Here's our troika. It will get us to the shore." Noel helped the ladies in. Suddenly the blizzard couldn't reach them anymore and they felt much warmer. The horses pulled the sled upwards and soon they were gliding smoothly over the frozen landscape.

It was still dark when they reached the shore. Draco trembled at the deafening sound of waves beating against the rocks. Noel and Sha summoned light and they walked down the icy path.

"There is our Knórr!" Noel shouted.

There it was in the small fjord, no longer than 45 feet, an open boat with short mast and one row of long oars on both sides.

"You don't really mean we're going to sail in *this*?" Draco asked Noel, wrinkling his nose "Why don't we use a Portkey or something?"

"The Danes don't like it when someone smuggles people in their country. We can't take any risks!"

"*Can't take any risks!*" Draco sneered to disguise his nervousness. "And this boat is supposed to be *safe*?"

"It's the best we got. Now get in, unless you want to go back to your igloo."

Sha and Narcissa were already aboard and Draco noticed that the sea around the ship was surprisingly calm. He boarded the ship and Noel joined then holding the rope in his hands. The oars started moving and in a few minutes they left the fjord and sailed over the open sea.



Noel and Sha turned their lights off and the ship started going up and down through the complete darkness. From time to time the white crests of sea foam would zoom in front of Draco's eyes and he couldn't resist letting out a scream of terror as they plunged into the abyss between waves, just to be lifted to the top of the next one in the next couple of seconds. It went on and on until the faint light of dawn revealed the cruel waters of the North Sea in its full power. Already exhausted, Draco wished it was still dark.

"Look, Orkney Islands!" Noel pointed to the hardly visible shoreline in front of them. "As soon as we disembark, you can use the Portkey directly to your home."

"What about you?" Asked Narcissa.

"We'll go to our home!" Sha replied.

"How can I ever thank you enough?"

"Just never forget what you feel at this moment. That will do!" Sha replied.

Narcissa looked down. "You must be thinking that I'm a cold and heartless aristocrat."

"Everybody has a heart. The only question is if we listen to it or not."

Narcissa didn't reply looking at the horizon. Next to her Draco wasn't paying attention. Soon, he smiled, soon he would be in England, and he would find her. He would find Rose Potter.

---

Severus Snape was sitting by the fireplace in his London flat. It was a small place, with one bedroom and the living room that Snape turned into a library. As a matter of fact the room was packed with books and flasks, barely leaving some space for a tiny desk beneath the window and an armchair. It seemed that Snape rarely had guests, for there was simply no space left to seat them.

However, that morning just when Snape was going to enjoy his morning tea, a loud crack from the fireplace broke the silence in his home. Sirius stumbled from the fireplace, tripped over the pile of books and losing his balance fell onto the floor.

When he looked up, Sirius met Snape's cold eyes looking at him curiously. "You have some nerve showing yourself here, Black. Especially after your little escapade from last night." He said pointing his wand.

"It's been a long time, Snape." Sirius replied standing up and brushing the soot from his robes. He looked awful, Snape thought with satisfaction, like he hadn't slept for days. Sirius looked at Snape uncertainly for a moment, then gazed around the apartment. "Er... nice place you got here."

Snape's eyes narrowed. "What do you want, playboy?" He hissed.

"I came to beg you for someone's life." Sirius said bluntly.

"So, it's Hermione isn't it? I'm surprised, *Sirius* that you're still with her. Or maybe I am wrong? Tell me, how many girls do you have on the side?" He smirked.

"How dare you imply that-" Sirius took a deep breath. "Never mind. That's not what I'm here for. Hermione is dying. She needs a blood transfusion, and you're the only one who can give it to her. We're running out of time." He added softly.

"Why would I risk my life to save your girlfriend?" Snape asked. He sat back down at the table still pointing his wand at Sirius. "I could easily detain you and collect not only the reward, but the Dark Lord's gratitude."

"Yes, the Dark Lord's gratitude is so long-lasting, just ask Lucius Malfoy." Sirius couldn't resist saying. Then he bit his lip, "But it's not about me. What has Hermione ever done to you?" His voice was pleading.

"What's in it for me? And sit down Black, will you, no use to stand there gaping at me like a fish."

Sirius sat. "Ask for anything you want from me."

"Everything, Black. I want everything you own, except your wand. Your property, your money, your house-elves, and other family heirlooms."

"Gladly Snape. Only you're forgetting I'm disowned." Sirius laughed bitterly.

"I have reasons to infer that you are going to be reinstated."

"How, why...what do you mean by that?"

Snape sighed, as if unable to believe the stupidity of his enemy. "You have young Potter on your side. He's going to defeat the Dark Lord. Don't tell me you don't know that."

"Know what?"

"Are we going to chat here or save Hermione?"

Several moments later, Sirius called Harry through the fireplace. "We need your invitation Harry." He explained. Sirius pulled his head from the fireplace, and Harry's appeared. "Severus Snape, you are invited into my home." He said formally.

---

The Weasleys were unusually silent that evening. Their new home in northern Saskatchewan wasn't as comfortable and cozy as they were used to, but Molly made her best to make it something more than just a hiding place. They were sitting near the fire, with grim expressions on their faces. On their slightly shabby but comfortable sofa laid Rose. She was fast asleep, her chest rising and falling. Occasionally, she would mutter or moan, stuck in a dream or memory. Flitwick stood next to her, running a few spells over her body. At times, he would mutter something like "Ah-ha" or "I see". Finally he stopped.

"I have removed it." He squeaked triumphantly. However the Weasleys didn't share his enthusiasm. Molly sobbed for a few seconds, but quickly pulled herself together. Flitwick gave Rose a potion.

"This will help her to regain strength. It's not easy for a patient to take a trip through the Floo network, especially like this one. It will take ten minutes for the potion to take effect."

The party sat in silence looking at the massive clock in the living room. Nobody seemed to feel like talking. Flitwick packed his small bag and updated his notes.

"It is time." Arthur Weasley spoke in a heavy voice. He and Charlie stood, and went to hug their family. Molly burst into tears immediately. Ginny flinched faintly as her father and brother came closer, but allowed them to kiss her. Ron didn't say a word.

"I don't see why I can't come as well," Percy said.

"Your mother needs you here Percy, and you know it. She can't do everything by herself." Arthur reminded him softly but sternly. "It's important to teach Ginny and Ron magic."

"Magic! They know the Dark Arts better than any of us, including you and Bill." Percy exclaimed.

"Magic is not only Dark, son." Molly reprimanded him before anyone could answer. Percy frowned but fell silent. Charlie slowly picked up Rose, who stirred for a moment but didn't wake. She was too weak to stay awake longer than a few seconds. Arthur and Molly embraced one last time, and the Weasley's turned toward the fireplace.

"I don't see why you have to go." Ginny said suddenly. "They have lots of people fighting already."

Arthur gave her a sad smile. "Not enough." He threw some powder into the fireplace and stepped in. "Blackdawn Manor!" He vanished followed by Flitwick.

Charlie gave Percy a final look. "Take care of them, brother." He said.

"I will," Percy promised. "It's just that...just this once, I wanted to come too."

Charlie didn't reply. Instead he stepped into the fire, and was engulfed by green flames for several seconds. When they faded, there was nothing left.

---

Meanwhile, back at Blackdawn Manor, Harry decided to postpone his hunt of the Dementors until Hermione was out of danger. They were in the Hospital Wing. On one bed was Hermione, still in great pain, on the other lay Snape, trying not to show his fear of needles, while Madam Pomfrey got ready to perform the blood transfusion. Sirius was holding Hermione's hand, while she tried to smile weakly at him.

"Professor Snape," said Madam Pomfrey, "As soon as I give this to Hermione you will take the Replenishing potion. Are you ready?" He nodded, she made to move toward him when Hermione spoke "Wait...not just yet."

They all turned to look at her.

"What is it?" Sirius asked anxiously. Harry frowned but didn't say anything; he already suspected what she was going to say next.

"You must promise me something, all three of you." Hermione said. "I want you to... stop hating each other and become friends. There is already too much hate in this world. Professor Snape is a great wizard and you must treat him as such."

Snape gave her and then Sirius a slight look of disgust, and she continued, coughing slightly. "If you don't I will refuse the donation, and the magical portion of the blood won't work."

"Are you really willing to die for that?" Snape asked.

"Yes." Hermione's voice was getting weaker.

"Nobody has ever done something like that for me."

Hermione tried to speak but she couldn't.

"I do!" Harry broke the silence. "I do promise!" He looked at Snape trying to convey to him that he was sincere.

"I promise!" Sirius kissed her hand. "I'll do anything for you, my love."

Snape hesitated for a moment. Then he laid his eyes on Hermione. She tried to smile at him. "Very well then. I promise."

Madam Pomfrey sighed in relief and asked in a brisk tone of voice "now may we *proceed?*"

Hermione nodded and she began the procedure. She connected the artery from Snape's arm directly to the vein in Hermione's. As the blood flew to Hermione, Snape grew paler and paler until he was white and his eyes started rolling upwards, leaving only white. Madam Pomfrey quickly removed the needle, and gave Snape the potion.

"How do you feel my dear?" She asked Hermione. She had an almost normal colored face, and the pain in her eyes seemed dulled.

"Much better, thanks. Only I'm tired."

"That's only to be expected." She turned to Harry and Sirius who looked alleviated. "Now LEAVE!"

Sirius gave one last look to Snape. "Thank you Severus, thank you for everything."

---

The closer they got to England, the stonier Narcissa's face got. Now that they were in Malfoy Manor, she looked ready to breathe fire. Lucius didn't seem pleased either.

"You didn't expect me, did you?"

Lucius muttered under his breath, but Draco could still hear him. "If that unscrupulous drunken Irish lout thinks that I'll pay him extra, he's sorely mistaken."

"Did you really believe that I would leave my mother in that Hell on Earth?" Draco asked with barely contained anger. "Father!" He added mockingly.

"How dare you talk to me like that?"

"Oh don't rant about disowning me again. Especially after all the trouble you went through to get me back. You don't want the Dark Lord to hear about your little trip to Dublin, do you?" Draco triumphed.

Lucius paled as he realized the position he was in.

"I expect you to sleep in the guest quarters. I don't want to see you near my bedroom ever again. I will arrange with Dobby that we don't meet for meals either. As a matter of fact, I don't want to see you at all."

"This is my house Narcissa! My house! If you want to avoid me, go somewhere else!"

"And leave my only child to your *care*? You almost got him killed, remember?"

Draco looked at them in disgust. He had already decided to leave them at the first opportune moment. He'd had it. All they did was fight. And he certainly wasn't waiting around to see if his father would try to make him a Death Eater. Draco Malfoy bowed to no one.

"Good night Mother. Good night Father." Draco nodded to them both, and made his way upstairs, pretending that he was from a normal family. On his way up he touched his wand hidden in his sleeve. It felt good to have it again. Patricia and Noel gave Draco and Narcissa their wands just before they parted. "I know you'll use it wisely Draco Malfoy." Patricia told him before taking her Portkey.

---

It was already lunch time when Harry and Sirius left Hermione's room. Harry realized that he completely forgot about his plans to hunt the Dementors. Now when Hermione was safe again life could go back to "normal" and he could continue with his plan. At that moment Polly ran towards him

"Master! Master!"

"Yes Polly?"

"Master has new guests! A lot of red-headed gentlemen, a dwarf and one girl that is sleeping! Do my master know them?"

Harry rushed to his bedroom followed by Sirius.

"ROSE!" Harry cried, when he saw her lying on his bed. The Weasleys were still standing by the fireplace, while Flitwick checked to see if everything was all right with Rose after the trip.

Flitwick spoke up. "We mustn't wake her up now," he warned, as Harry knelt by the bed holding her hand and trying not to cry. "She's not in a coma anymore, but in a normal sleep state. She can stay awake for only a minute or two. I also managed to dispel the Enslavement curse and block the telepathic bond with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. You must let her get some rest and talk to her tomorrow. And another curious thing. For some reason the bond grew weaker, which is the reason why your sister is no longer in a coma."

Harry's heartbeat doubled. "Yes, of course. We won't wake her. Polly will make sure of that. She'll move her to another room, away from the fireplace. Professor, how can I ever repay you?"

"Don't mention it, my dear boy." squeaked Flitwick. Arthur coughed slightly. Harry turned and stood.

"Oh, Mr. Weasley, it's so good to see you. All of you. How are Ron and Ginny?" He asked. The first thing he had thought about when he saw the Weasleys was Ron and Ginny. It had been hard, seeing them in Massachusetts, acting like mere shadows of their former selves.

"They have recovered remarkably well," Arthur replied "They're catching up with their education, thanks to Molly and Percy. I must thank Hermione for sending all those books over."

"That'll have to wait until she gets better. I'll tell you everything in the lounge." Harry said quietly, pointing at his sister. They left the room.

The Weasleys greeted everyone in the lounge, and spent the next half hour, listening to various stories that had taken place since their last visit. Arthur was especially excited when he heard about the Cheering powder, and its effects on the Dementors. George enthusiastically told about how he and Fred would dust them with the powder. This made the other members of his family very confused, and it was then that Harry told them about the plan to attack Azkaban.

"When do you plan to do this?" Bill asked.

"Tomorrow, if the twins make enough powder. Moody, you and Arthur will make a detailed plan of Azkaban, since you both know it so well. You two will also lead the attack since I'll be busy with the Dementors. I have to go and prepare myself for tomorrow."

Arthur and Moody nodded their heads. Harry left the room and headed to the North Wing. He wanted to check how his new followers were doing. Harry found them in much better shape, but still too weak for any action. The twins seemed to recover remarkably well.

"My Liege." They all stood up when Harry arrived.

"You were all detained in Azkaban?" Harry asked.

"Yes."

"I'm going to fly there tomorrow to rescue the hostages. Do you know any entry that isn't in use anymore?"

"My Liege," Sejanus spoke first "the dungeons of Azkaban are so deep that they lead to the underworld. The walls are thick and strong. There are protective wards everywhere. Even without any resistance from inside, it would be very difficult to break in by force."

"Is there any other way?"

"Yes there is." Cassius said.

"How?"

"Instead using your own magic, you should harvest the magic that is already there. The gaol was built on a spot that had very powerful Wild Magic. Call upon it and use it against your foes!"

"Why didn't you do that when you were imprisoned?"

"I learnt about it only when I was in the Realm of the Dead already, My Liege."

"How to use the Wild Magic?"

"You must focus on it. Empty your mind and let the magic fill you. Then you can channel its power against the walls. Remember My Liege; the Wild Magic wants to be released!"

"How do I know what spell to cast?"

"You cannot My Liege. Once enabled the Wild Magic will act on its own! But your hope is in its desire to break free from the Azkaban!" Sejanus replied.

"So it will destroy the Azkaban defenses first!"

"Yes My Liege!"

"What is it going to do after that?"

"Who knows? It will spread into the wilderness to find magical creatures. You will be its savior."

"How to find the right place to call upon it?"

"The wild creatures can feel the Wild Magic. My Liege is an Animagus."

"Of course. Thank you Sejanus." Then Harry pulled several wands from his pocket. "Here, each one of you try these wands and find the best match for yourselves. As soon as you get better I want you to get more of them any way you can!" He looked at the old couple. "Except stealing from my soldiers. There will be more souls coming from the Realm of the Dead to join us."

After leaving the North Wing Harry decided to get some rest. After all the excitement had occupied his attention for so long, he suddenly realized he was completely exhausted. He went to his bedroom, put the Dreamcatcher on and fell asleep.

